# Interview with Charles Robert Beecham

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CHARLES ROBERT BEECHAM

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Getting Into Government Information Program, Then In Department of State—Assignment To Japan Desk Of IPS: 1952.

*Q: This is an interview with Charles Robert Beecham on July 5, 1990. My name is Jack O'Brien and we are here to talk about Bob's experience in the USIA and its predecessors. Bob, how did you happen to get into this profession?*

BEECHAM: By accident, partly. But coming out of World War II I did feel there might be things that could be done to help prevent that sort of event from ever happening again. At the end of 1951, as I was finishing up a year and a half in Corcoran Art School, I began calling various government agencies, including State and CIA, looking for work. I remember calling the Department to talk about a job with the information program and being told, more than once, that they were not hiring. But as a kid in South Dakota when I was in the sixth or seventh grade, one of my teachers was a guy named Everin O'Brien who at that point in 1951 was working here for South Dakota Senator Karl Mundt.

I don't think I went to O'Brien purposely to ask him for help; it came up in a conversation that we had over the phone about what I was doing.

*Q: I should explain that he was not related to me.*

BEECHAM: When I told O'Brien I was not getting much encouragement, he said, “Well, I know some people down there. Why don't I call them.” And, as you may remember, the person he called turned out to be Dick Fitzpatrick. I went to talk to Dick at some point and completed an application. Then, like a lot of others I waited several months to get word that there was a job opportunity. When it came, it involved a guy by the name Jack O'Brien, who I remember tried to discourage me from accepting what they were prepared to offer me—a clerk-typist position. Do you remember our discussion?

*Q: No.*

BEECHAM: Well, as I recall, it was that I would take the job on the understanding that I wouldn't be limited to clerk/typist activities, which you agreed to. I think it was in February of 1952 that I started on the Japan Desk that you had been brought in by Charlie Arnot to set up.

*Q: You and who else?*

BEECHAM: Dottie Brose and Joe Reilly. I don't think I had any idea what I was getting into at that point. It was a very interesting experience for me. Certainly I hadn't ever been involved in anything like it. My only other exposure to government was working at FBI headquarters for brief periods before and after military service. My attitude toward work, I suppose, was that you took what was available and went on from there.

I remember spending as much time as possible talking to people about the organization, trying to find out what others were doing and where they fitted into the picture. I don't know if that was unique or not, but it was my experience in the Agency as time went on,

particularly in domestic parts of it, that too many people rarely had a good idea, or much interest, in the way their own job and their own office fitted into the larger scheme of things.

*Q: I think, Bob, we might explain here that at that time, 1952, the Japanese were still getting acquainted with the rest of the world and demands for information about America were almost unlimited. We had the job of providing much of that, most of it in response to requests from Tokyo. You and I were filing great quantities of copy to the Japanese press at their request.*

BEECHAM: Being totally new to what was going on I don't remember having the same sense of that as you do. Certainly, a lot of what I was involved in initially was very routine and very clerical. I understood better later on, after getting some opportunities to do some feature writing and reporting.

*Q: Well, I just came from five years in Japan and almost everything that we were sending out was picked up in the Japanese press.*

BEECHAM: When I went to Tokyo in 1955 I then saw the other end of the operation—how every day we had scores of Japanese media people coming into that building looking for the kinds of press and publications material, that the IPS Japan Desk had been sending out.

*Q: Well, you had that first IPS job for how long?*

BEECHAM: The place was reorganized shortly after I arrived and you became chief of the Far East Branch. Then you went to Indonesia in 1953. Who took your place?

*Q: George Sayles?*

1955: Assignment To Japan As Assistant Publications Officer.

BEECHAM: Yes. I did various writing, editing and reporting assignments in the Far East Branch after the Japan Desk was eventually phased out. But for a time, I guess, after Dottie Brose and Joe Reilly had left, I was a one-man Japan Desk. That may have been the point when I became interested in going overseas, particularly to Japan. I used to pester some of the personnel types regularly. Eventually, the chance to go to Japan as Assistant Publications Officer materialized. I think Bill Hutchinson, who had been Publications Officer in Tokyo and was then working in IPS, was probably instrumental in getting Personnel to consider my case.

I arrived in Tokyo on May Day of 1955. It was raining and the Japanese unions were out in force demonstrating. My hotel bed shook slightly the first night from a small earthquake somewhere and added to the excitement. My new boss was the Publications Officer, Carl Bartz. Clem Hurd was the Press Attach#, Charlie Schroth was the Press Officer, Charlie Davis was there going to language school. I knew all three at least slightly from their earlier work around IPS.

*Q: Who was the Public Affairs Officer?*

BEECHAM: Ken Bunce was there briefly. When he left Lew Schmidt served as both PAO and Executive Officer. Later on, Joe Evans came out as PAO and Art Hummel came as his deputy. USIS Tokyo was a large organization with numerous Americans and dozens of Japanese employees. At the outset it seemed very imposing and somewhat disjointed. I kept busy trying to catch on to how the program worked and how people went about their jobs.

I remember feeling that Lew Schmidt, while he was in charge, ran things with a very firm hand, particularly with respect to money. I don't know why it happened so early after my arrival, but I remember Bartz filling me in on some sort of pamphlet project he wanted to undertake. He needed additional money for it, but because he didn't want to talk to Schmidt about it, he sent me up to Lew's office instead. It seemed to me at the time that

Lew sort of kept the money locked in his office and you went up and made a case for whatever it might be you were planning to do. Later on, of course, I learned that that was Lew's way of keeping the Branch Chiefs from quickly overspending their allotted budgets.

A. Birth Of A Japanese Language Magazine America (Beisho Daiori).

Carl was a very inventive and articulate boss. He was convinced that one of the things most needed in those days was a magazine that would put Japanese scholars and intellectuals in touch with the thinking of their American counterparts. It took months of constant, often frantic, effort on Carl's part to perfect the concept, win Washington support and financing, line up Japanese specialists to serve on the editorial board, recruit a Japanese editor, find a prestigious publisher and settle on the dozens of American scholarly journals from which materials were to be drawn and reprinted in Japanese in a new monthly called America. Bartz and a hand-picked board of Japanese scholars reviewed the contents of the American magazines and picked out those considered particularly appropriate for Japanese readership. It was a huge success and I suspect became the model for similar Agency periodicals later produced in Washington, Delhi and other posts.

I found myself trying to manage much of other publications programming over those months, but recollect few specifics other than an ambitious, heavily illustrated pamphlet on the Hungarian revolution.

*Q: You had that job for how long, Bob?*

B. Circa 1956—Beecham Becomes Publications Officer For USIS, Japan.

BEECHAM: I don't recall exactly, but Carl left for Okinawa in a year or so and I succeeded him. One thing that I should mention is that when I went to Tokyo I really didn't have any deep interest or commitment toward the Foreign Service. I went with the idea that I would do this for a time and then probably go back to Washington and settle down into some

job in IPS. I was offered a double promotion the first time around in Tokyo. But since the Agency linked the double aspect of it to my transferring to Foreign Service, I turned it down. I took a lot of ribbing about that, but was lucky enough to be promoted again the following year. This time they left me no options; to get the promotion I had to convert. Of course, Jane and I were married by that time and I had a much better understanding of what I was getting into than I had earlier.

1958: Home Leave And Reassignment To Japan As Special Assistant To New PAO.

My first tour lasted three years, as did all my other tours abroad, and when I arrived back on home leave in 1958 you had already set the stage for what came next. George Hellyer, then East Area Director, was getting ready to move to Tokyo as PAO, was searching for a special assistant and had gotten my name from you. During my consultation in Washington, George called me in to talk and ended up offering me the job, which I accepted, of course.

A. New PAO George Hellyer Attempts To Reorganize USIS/Japan—Dissent.

George arrived in Tokyo with the very clear notion that he needed to reshape the Japan program. But to be quite truthful about it, he didn't seem to have a really firm idea of what he wanted to do. I may never have understood what exact problems he had with the existing program, but his determination to generate change and improvement was obvious.

I recall George saying to me, and probably to others too, that he wanted a new country plan. In fact, he stressed he wanted a perfect country plan. I suggested to him that a perfect country plan and a perfect country program would be ones in which USIS worked itself out of a job. My thinking on this was probably influenced by my association with Bartz and the America magazine project. That was a prime example of American private sector influences being brought to bear on the thinking of leading Japanese. I felt it made a great deal of sense for the Agency to be promoting activities in which the natural forces within

American society were brought into play to accomplish what the Agency was trying to achieve.

*Q: How did George respond?*

BEECHAM: Very enthusiastically, at least until he heard from people in Washington that they didn't view it as a very practical idea for building an entire program around. As you remember, it became a very controversial proposition and we went through endless back and forth with Washington, plus at the Tokyo level an awful lot of internal upheaval and dissension. George became pretty unpopular with much of the staff. I guess I did too. Certainly the changes we were pushing weren't very popular in many respects. I think it was Harry Keith, the Mopix officer, who came up with the rather derisive term “thinkers and doers” to describe the proposed staffing pattern. I remember John Reinhardt was very skeptical about the whole thing. John was in Kyoto, I believe, as BPAO and was only one of many who were very critical of the scheme.

*Q: This was the John Reinhardt who later became ambassador?*

BEECHAM: And eventually he was made head of the Agency under President Carter. He then started his own “thinkers and doers” approach to Agency programming.

*Q: George's idea never took root, did it?*

BEECHAM: Well, it took root in the sense that the whole place was remodeled, new offices were established. There were half a dozen or so officers who were given assignments as what we called Program Officers. Their basic function was to develop ways to reach influential Japanese, both individuals and groups, more effectively than we had in the past. The emphasis was to be not only on Agency or USIS products, but also on specialized materials coming from independent US sources—authoritative research and analysis, scholarly articles, government documents, Congressional hearings and reports, etc.

*Q: Well, let's summarize this Bob. How long did it go on and what was the outcome?*

B. Dissent And Problems With Ambassador Leads To Hellyer Departure anReplacement by Bill Copeland.

BEECHAM: The outcome, I think, was dictated by George's departure, more or less under a cloud, not only because of the reorganization, but because of other frictions involving the Ambassador. Months of preparations for the aborted Eisenhower visit put an added strain on relationships all over the Mission during that interval. I don't really know or remember all the story of George's departure. But he was replaced by Bill Copeland who came in quite clearly to reverse the direction in which things had been moving and to keep the Ambassador happier.

*Q: The Ambassador at that time was...?*

BEECHAM: Douglas MacArthur II, who was replaced after Kennedy's election by Ed Reischauer. I left in 1961 and came back to Washington uncertain about my next assignment. What the Agency proposed for me was the USOM Information Officer job in Bangkok. I was not interested in anything that removed me from USIS main- stream activity.

1961: Home Leave And Eventual Assignment To Year Of Academic Study At Stanford University.

Fortunately, several months earlier, when the Agency first announced the beginning of a new academic training program, I had sent in a proposal to which I'd given a great deal of thought. I wasn't offered any hope while on Washington consultation that I might get one of the only two grants being awarded. In fact, I ran into the Area Director, Paul Neilson, in the hallway one day and when he asked when I would be leaving for Bangkok, I said I thought an academic year assignment was still a possibility. “Don't count on it,” he said,

in a way that made me think that he and others who felt I was being uncooperative had already fixed the outcome so far as I was concerned.

We spent home leave in California that summer and it was not until the morning we were scheduled to go to a nearby air base to get shots for Thailand that someone from Personnel called to say I'd been given one of the academic grants, Barbara White received the other one. The caller asked what I thought about trying for admission to Stanford University under Agency auspices. I pointed out that the school year was due to begin almost immediately and what I had in mind when I conceived the proposal originally was an East coast university. Whoever I was talking to said the Agency felt a need to "balance things off" and would like to place an officer in one of the West coast institutions. So I drove over to the Stanford campus and talked to T.A. Bailey, the historian, to see if he would help me organize a program. He was very helpful. I spent a year at Stanford studying basically post-Civil War American history, which I hadn't much focused on since high school. I was a history major in college, but primarily in European and ancient history.

*Q: Was that a worthwhile year?*

BEECHAM: Yes. But less in terms of what I was able to accomplish academically with a necessarily revised study program than as a way of distancing myself from Agency problems for a year. I had come out of Tokyo feeling pretty badly beat up and it gave me a chance to regain some perspective and new energy. It persuaded me it was a good idea for people who had the chance to get away from day-to-day operations to assess their own situation and that of the Agency.

*Q: What followed Stanford?*

July, 1963: Made Publications Officer, Bangkok, But Soon Replaced Press Attach#. Vietnam War Buildup Brought Many Problems.

BEECHAM: I was sent to Bangkok as Publications Officer. Within a week or so after my arrival, the Press Officer was called home for some reason and there apparently was nobody else around at the time who could replace him. I had no strong feeling about it, one way or the other, but I remember my surprise in my first meeting with Ambassador Kenneth Tod Young to hear Howard Garnish, the PAO, assure him and Al Puhan, the DCM, that Beecham was highly qualified, based on his experience in Tokyo working for Ambassador MacArthur. Actually, the only time I had any direct contact with MacArthur on a press matter, the Ambassador threw me out of his office for neglecting to take notes while he was dictating a news release for USIS to send out about something he had said or done earlier that day.

*Q: Nonetheless, that was the job you got in Bangkok?*

BEECHAM: Yes. I have forgotten when you showed up there.

*Q: I came in July, 1963, replacing Garnish.*

BEECHAM: And, of course, I stayed in the Press Attach# job until I left Bangkok in December, 1968.

*Q: Both of us can recall that those were busy years. You certainly had your hands full with the press—not only American, but Thai and others. This was, of course, the period during which we were deeply engaged in Vietnam. How would you describe your problems during that period?*

A. US Air Force Buildup Using Thai Bases Begun Without Embassy Knowledge Of Facts Caused Difficulty With Both US and Thai Press.

BEECHAM: Well, I think my worst problem early on in our Air Force buildup there was being left out of the picture for a longer period then was good for me or good for the Mission. I simply did not know initially that we were preparing to bomb and then bombing

North Vietnam out of Thai bases. In my ignorance, there were instances when I misled press guys about what was planned or actually underway. The one I regret most was Frank McCullough.

*Q: From Time?*

BEECHAM: Yes. He never forgave me, I'm sure, for not in his view being straight with him about it. But at that point I was as dumb about what was going on as he may have been.

*Q: I think it is important to point out here that Graham Martin was then ambassador. He was superb in backing up USIA when it came to a battle I might have with Washington. But Graham Martin did not believe in a Country Team. He kept secrets to himself; even the DCM was not aware of them at times. So it was Martin's style that kept you and me and most of the other key people in the Mission from knowing what he was up to.*

BEECHAM: I remember one conversation with him about the problem after it had became fairly clear to many people that something serious was going on. Martin suggested, “Well, why can't you tell them that the planes stop in Vietnam, that they go over there to arm themselves?”

There was quite a long period of time there when the correspondents were convinced that Thai bases were being used for bombing runs in North Vietnam, but could not get confirmation. Our friends in the military, as you remember, were always anxious to get their story out about it, but they were kept under wraps by Martin because of Thai demands that while the US could use Thai bases for strikes against North Vietnam, we were not allowed to discuss the actual facts. I don't think many correspondents ever understood that aspect of the arrangements Martin had agreed to.

*Q: The question that Bob describes is one that both of us shared because of Martin's style of operating. It was absolutely ridiculous for us to have to put on a straight face for experienced correspondents, who had chapter and verse about our bombing of North*

*Vietnam, and for us to either deceive or put it in a way that made us look foolish. A Thai told me one time that they were just big mosquitoes up there, going north.*

Gradually Martin was out. There were more sources of information coming from outside Thailand than there was from inside of Thailand. It led, later, to a deal in which the United States and Thailand agreed to have an official acknowledgment of what we were doing. That certainly was unusual in the many interviews I have done, but I must say at this point that Bob Beecham had a difficult time, but he handled himself beautifully.

1968: Assigned To VOA Policy Office.

Let's get onto the next assignment. You left Bangkok in what year?

BEECHAM: 1968.

*Q: Your next assignment was what?*

BEECHAM: I went to the Voice of America in the policy office, working for our good friend, Paul Modic, who promptly went off on another assignment after urging me to come work for him.

*Q: Was that an unexpected assignment for you?*

BEECHAM: No, I knew where I was to go. It wasn't one I would have chosen, perhaps, but I didn't have any objections to it.

*Q: How did you like the VOA job?*

BEECHAM: I enjoyed that year at the Voice because it gave me an opportunity to see parts of the Agency I knew little about and to get acquainted with a unique organization and its staff.

*Q: Did you want to stay longer?*

BEECHAM: No, not really. When the opportunity arose for me to go back to IPS, to run the Far East Branch, I was more than happy to leave, despite conversations with some at the Voice about staying on and what might be in the offing if I did. I had been there for a year and learned a good deal about it, but the idea of going back to run the office that I had started out in was an inviting proposition.

1970: Return To USIA/IPS As Far East Branch Chief—After Two Years, Deputy Head Of IPS.

*Q: So you went back to IPS when?*

BEECHAM: 1970, as Far East Branch chief. I found on the staff some of the same people who had been there my first time around.

*Q: How long were you in that job?*

BEECHAM: I don't remember. It must have been maybe two years before I moved up to the deputy director's office. Lyle Copmann had been made director of IPS, replacing Ken Towery when he moved over to run IOP. Lyle spent several weeks deciding who he wanted as deputy. He never brought it up with me, but I know that for a while he was a bit worried by indications he found in some of my fitness reports that my operating style was not quite as gentle and easy going as his own. I made sure it never became a problem between us.

*Q: How long did you have the deputy job?*

BEECHAM: Two or three years. When Lyle left in 1975 or 1976 I was made director.

*Q: Let's combine this. From the Voice you went to the Far East Branch in IPS. Then you became the deputy and then you became the director. Can you review that period and comment on the changes you might have seen since you were first there.*

BEECHAM: I don't know if I can do it exactly that way. One of the views that I returned with was that an IPS weakness had always been inadequate knowledge about what goes on at USIS posts—insufficient sense of what materials field posts need.

A. Difficulty In Getting IPS To Understand Needs Of Field Posts.

As branch chief, I tried to impress the staff with the value of the Country Plans. Admittedly, when we were abroad, a lot of us thought they were often a useless exercise. Whatever that case, they did in those days reflect what post objectives were, what program activities were being planned and what kinds of media and other materials were needed to carry them out.

We developed our own scheme in the Branch to analyze the country plans from Far East posts and then attempted to provide the information materials that were being sought.
I tried to get this idea across outside the Branch too, since publications was a separate division with field servicing functions over which the Branch had no control. I had had a run in with Al Roland, the Publications Division Chief, before I'd been back two weeks, over whether his office would provide us with regular reports listing the various materials that that division was shipping to Far East posts.

When you and I were there in the 50's, the regional branches called the shots on virtually every field service. But all that had changed over the years.

Roland, as I discovered after our dispute had gone on for a while, was one of Towery's favorites and had been hand picked by Ken for the publications job. He must have complained because it was not long before I got called in to explain to Towery and others around the front office what the fuss was all about. The only thing I remember about that

session is that after an hour or so, Towery ended it by shaking his head and saying, “I don't see what different it makes.”

Later on, when I decided I needed some outside help, I went to John Reinhardt who was Far East Area Director then. After describing what I was doing in the Branch in an effort to make it more supportive of field posts, I said that with his permission I'd send him a more detailed memorandum and route it through Towery in an effort to keep the IPS front office focused on field servicing issues and related organizational problems. Towery may or may not have read or understood the memo, but I know it floated around among his front office staff for months and probably was among the briefing papers Lyle Copmann read when he was brought in as Towery's deputy. He may have remembered it when he began looking for a deputy of his own. Lyle, of course, as a Foreign Service Officer, had first hand experience with the problems of field servicing from Washington.

Together, we put heavy emphasis on making it an IPS-wide practice to pay close attention to field needs and country plans. Lyle was a master at bureaucratic politics, and he made sure that the organization as a whole showed sensitivity to what area offices thought the Press and Publications Service ought to be doing to meet the needs of their particular posts.

We always felt during those years that IPS was somewhat out in front of other Agency elements in that important respect.

*Q: When you took charge of IPS and had authority that you had not had before, did you make radical changes?*

BEECHAM: No, I think all the changes flowed more or less naturally out of what had been started or put in place by that time.

*Q: You were trying to consolidate them, perhaps?*

BEECHAM: We were attempting some different things with staff also. We were trying to get some IPS people abroad for at least one tour so that they would have field experience to bring back and apply it in some fashion. That was one of many projects more or less sidetracked by various changes made during the Carter administration. Had things remained the same, I think it would have proved a very useful Agency practice to draw more and more people out of Washington, media elements in particular, for assignments overseas to give them a better perspective on overall Agency operations.

*Q: Was it during this period that there were major changes in the technical side in IPS, the means of sending the Wireless File, for example?*

BEECHAM: Yes, that was when optical scanners were first put in the Wire Room. About the same time or a little later automatic data processing equipment was put into the Publications Division to handle the typesetting of magazines and pamphlets.

*Q: Did you have any problems with that? Did anyone resist it? Was financing a problem?*

BEECHAM: I don't remember now in any detail how provisions were made for the financing. Probably most of the money came out of the Director's reserve or other special funds, not the regular IPS budget. Ed Nickel was in Administration in those days and was taking a special interest in our proposals for technical improvements.

*Q: Did you have at that time any major reductions in force?*

BEECHAM: I don't think there were major reductions in force, but each year we could count on having to cut a few positions. I think Copmann was always very generous and cooperative on that score, considering that the normal bureaucratic instinct is to enlarge staff or fabricate ways to avoid giving up resources. We worked hard to consolidate and streamline IPS services so that we could give up resources without seriously weakening the program.

*Q: How would you characterize relations with other elements of the Agency at that time? Was anyone standing over your shoulder, for example?*

BEECHAM: Not really. Jim Keogh, when he was USIA director, took great interest in what the magazine was doing. We had regular meetings involving Keogh and the magazine editors to go over the contents of upcoming issues and discuss major articles or treatments that were in prospect. Less day-to-day attention was paid outside IPS to the other side of the shop, on the press side, the Wireless File, for example. There was an effort during those years to upgrade feature and byline materials going out under the IPS imprint. Staff written features were cut back sharply in favor of authoritative articles commissioned outside or acquired in the form of reprints. That trend started early when Copmann, for budgetary reasons, decided to eliminate the Special Materials Branch which had been the source of so much useless anti-communist output over the years. It was a sacred cow and its elimination after hardly any debate left a lot of old-timers very nervous.

*Q: Well, Bob, you had the satisfaction of coming from a rather lowly job in IPS to being in charge of it. I don't want to cut you off in any part of it, but are there any general conclusions that you would like to make before we go on?*

BEECHAM: I do have one favorite anecdote about that aspect of my career. Howard Oiseth, who had been around IPS for years, even before I arrived the first time, was one of those who was never really comfortable with many of our measures altering IPS and his own, rather senior status. But he and I remained on fairly good terms and when he finally decided to retire, I made a point of hosting an office party for him so he could leave with something of a splash. Howard never exhibited the greatest sense of humor in the world, but in his farewell remarks he spoke about our association going back to my first appearance in IPS. “The lesson of all this,” he told people there, “is be kind to your office boy, he might grow up to become your boss.”

*Q: Okay, lets follow your career after IPS.*

BEECHAM: That was a brief, unfortunate episode. John Reinhardt came back to the Agency as director, apparently convinced that many of us had been around Washington too long. It was true, I guess, I had been back some eight or nine years. John seemed to envision a new agency in which service discipline, particularly personnel regulations, would be fully restored. One aim was to get certain senior officers out of Washington and into the field. I think John also had it in mind that some of those who had been at headquarters for so long had built up power bases of one sort or another and were going to be a problem as he went forward with major changes.

B. Publication By IPS Of History Of IPS Origins And Development.

Nearly everyone could see that some sort of immense organizational shakeup was coming. In IPS, one of our reactions was to publish a 70-page booklet that contained the definitive history of IPS. We gave it the title, “The way it was: USIA's Press and Publications Service (1935-1977).” It boosted staff morale at a critical juncture, which was its principal purpose, but it also could be seen as illustrating John's point about personal power bases. We didn't clear its preparation or issuance with anybody and it was produced in our own printing plant in Manila.

Beecham Asked By USIA Director Reinhardt To Take Indonesian Language Training And Go To Indonesia As PAO.

John had asked me to go to Indonesia as PAO, and or course I recognized it was a very good foreign assignment. But from another standpoint, after managing IPS, where what I had to work with included a $12-15 million budget, a staff in Washington of some 300, plus another couple hundred people at printing plants abroad, it frankly did not seem all that attractive. Also, by that point, as a class 1 officer with no advancement in prospect, I was beginning to feel I had about served my time in the Agency and was not particularly interested in going overseas again.

A. Beecham Reluctant To Accept Indonesia Assignment Or Language Training, But Nevertheless Enters Language Course.

When the matter of Indonesian language training came up, I resisted, partly because I did not want to put forth that kind of effort for a tour that was going to last two years, or even less. I regarded it as a waste of Agency resources, and I pointed out to Reinhardt and Personnel that come February 1980, not only would three years from my last pay hike have passed, but I'd have accumulated 35 years of government service credit as well.

In January 1978, lacking any other acceptable options, I entered language training, very uncertain about what I should do exactly. I found language study very difficult, dull and time consuming. I didn't want to hold back the rest of the class, so I worked hard enough to keep up, but I also began to take a serious look at what might be possible outside USIA.

B. Final Conviction That Indonesian Assignment Was Not Desirable—Appeal To USIA Deputy Director Meets Silence. Final Days In Ambiguity.

Before long, however, I began to worry that my fairness or loyalty to the Agency might come into question later on. So in early April I wrote a letter to Reinhardt's deputy, Charlie Bray. I told him I was exploring possibilities outside the Agency, but still planning to go to Indonesia on the understanding my tour would conclude at the close of 1979, a couple months earlier than previously discussed. I enclosed a copy of an overview paper that I had written to help search out any second career opportunities that might satisfy my continuing interest in US public diplomacy. I did not want them to get feedback from somewhere outside the Agency and not know what was going on. I also told Charlie I was working up some comprehensive resume material and in that specific connection asked him to do a fitness report on my last eight or nine months in IPS.

No interim or final fitness report, nor any other response, was ever forthcoming, either from Bray or anybody else. I considered that a senseless, irresponsible rebuff on Bray's part. I

thought it flew directly in the face of John Reinhardt's devotion to the rule book. I resented it then and still do.

In any event, after a couple more months of Indonesian, that experience, plus the steady flow of complaints and other distress signals coming out of the Agency, persuaded me I should move my retirement date forward to the end of 1978. I informed Reinhardt and others and said I was prepared to go to Indonesia for the short period remaining. John expected me to go, but Mort Smith, who was the area director, thought that made no sense at all. I had to agree with him.

*Q: For what period of time would this be?*

BEECHAM: Well, it would have been for a six or eight month period. I had no actual assignment from mid-1978 on.

*Q: So you were just wandering the halls?*

BEECHAM: No, I didn't wander the halls, or twist in the wind either. I found a spare office in IPS that I went to daily. People knew where to find me. Some in Personnel, Ben Fordney for one, urged me to stay away from the Agency, but I was not about to get myself in the position of failing to show up for work every day. Some other people, Dan Oleksiw for one, offered to help out. Dan was running inspections and tried to get me on some trips. I agreed to go, but never knew for sure why they fell through. Front office intervention, probably.

*Q: So you then retired officially as of what date?*

BEECHAM: January, 1979.

1979: Unpleasantness And Rigidity Of Agency's Director And Deputy Over Indonesian Assignment Culminates In Beecham's Retirement.

*Q: And with no regrets?*

BEECHAM: By that time I was well along in planning the publication I started later. Having been left to my own devices for six or seven months, I had pretty much settled on what I wanted to try.

*Q: Well, that is a separate story.*

BEECHAM: Yes, that is right, even though the effort I put into publishing the Chronicle, at least in my view, was simply an extension of my USIA career. It was meant to be a constituency-building exercise. I'll always regret that the Agency leadership, the Advisory Commission, and others weren't smart enough or interested enough to see that. I got an appointment with John and went to his office to fill him in so he would know where I was coming from long before the first issue ever appeared.

*Q: You have no regrets about your overall career in USIA?*

BEECHAM: No, it was a very satisfying experience.

*Q: Would you recommend it to a young person?*

BEECHAM: Yes, but it is a different proposition now than it was in those days.

*Q: Any general comments on such things as the Agency's personnel policies, its treatment of local employees, its help in case of family disaster, etc.?*

Observations On USIA Career And On Ultimate Fate Of Agency.

BEECHAM: In the early years, it seems to me, the Agency's personnel policies and practices created relationships somewhat similar to those in a very large family. I think all of that changed when the career service came along. Things became super-organized, complicated, systematized, and most of all, depersonalized. Staff composition changed

as well. When I first went overseas, nearly all the people working at the post were experienced media people, or specialists who had come out of advertising or public relations. We didn't have many “generalists” in those days; they began showing up with the first Junior Officer Trainee classes.

*Q: What about your comments on local employees?*

BEECHAM: Perhaps it was USIA people serving at foreign posts who gave the Agency its special feelings toward the local employee. It seems to me that the Agency took a great deal more interest in the local staff than the Department or the Embassy ever did. In my view, USIA did an outstanding job in terms of trying to see that local employees were properly compensated and had the opportunities that they needed and deserved.

*Q: As of this date, do you think the Agency is properly structured? Would you favor returning part of it to State?*

BEECHAM: I don't know whether I would favor that or not, but it seems to me, given what has happened internationally, it is awfully hard to make a case for many of the activities the Agency has carried on for the last 10 or 20 years. As the countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union open up to American influences of all sorts and there are no restrictions on the flow of information from the United States, you don't really need a government agency to enlarge or supplement that.

Walter Lippmann, I discovered during the year I spent at Stanford, anticipated some of the Agency's difficulties and short- comings over the years. He was among those who testified at Congressional hearings after World War II when legislation to form an overseas information program was under consideration.

Lippmann argued it was a mistake to put bureaucrats in charge of a peace time overseas information program on behalf of the US. It was his opinion that the only kind of a program that made sense for a democracy of the American sort was one based on the free flow of

information generated by American society itself, the media, academics, etc. That seems even truer today than it was at that point, I think.

*Q: Well, Bob, I give you this chance for any other general observations or comments before I turn off the recorder.*

BEECHAM: No, I think that is fine.

*Q: Okay, thanks.*

End of interview